

COBRA STRIKE

2013

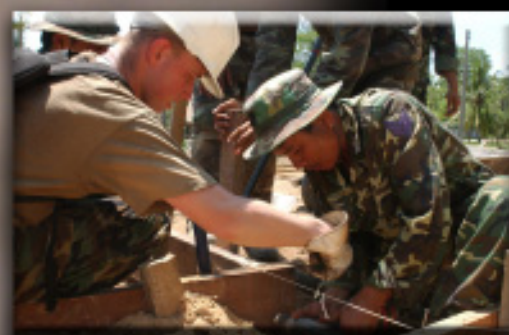


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Combined Exercise Cobra Gold 2003

Pagavy Phangnivong doesn't remember any of his southeast Asia heritage since his family left Laos three days after his birth.

Assigned to the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment of the US Army's 25th Infantry Division, Cobra Gold 2003 allowed Spc. Phangnivong to return to his home continent. He completed his duty in Thailand May 30, returning to Hawaii with many memories.

"I picked up the Laotian language from my parents growing up and the Thai language is nearly identical," he said. "Besides my regular duty, I acted as a translator for my unit while at Cobra Gold."

While other US service members communicated with their Thai counterparts with improvised sign language, Phangnivong was able to interact at a higher level.

"You could tell that the Thai and US soldiers wanted to learn from each other and the respect was there," he said. "It was good to see the interaction. The Thais were very interested in our equipment and our guys picked up a lot from them, especially the jungle survival tactics."

Whether it was the American technology, the US military's reputation after Operation Iraqi Freedom, or just the aura of the USA, Thai respect towards US service members was special, Phangnivong said.

"Everywhere you went in day-to-day operations, you felt the Thais looked up to you, no matter what your rank," he said. "It was a cool experience."



Mutual respect and understanding are at the heart of the Asia-Pacific region's premiere combined military exercise, Cobra Gold. The region's security and economic stability are vitally important to the world. Cobra Gold's annual multilateral training between Thailand, Singapore, and the US demonstrates to every nation that the three allies are determined to keep the region's economy and people safe.

Cobra Gold 2003, the 22nd edition of this annual training exercise, was designed to ensure Asia-Pacific peace, to strengthen the ability of the Royal Thai Armed Forces to defend Thailand, and to better prepare the Thai forces to respond to regional contingencies. Singapore, eager to learn lessons and tactics from the Thais and US, participated for the fourth year in a row.

This year's Cobra Gold training focus was on joint task force operations, combined field operations, command post exercises, peace enforcement operations, humanitarian assistance, and team-building activities. Cobra Gold also assisted Thai citizens' quality of life through combined Thai-US medical and engineer civic assistance projects.

Royal Thai Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy forces numbered around 7,000 while approximately 5,800 US service members took part. One hundred members of the Singapore Armed Forces participated.

The commander for Cobra Gold 03 was Vice Admiral Som Jai Wattanayothin from the Royal Thai Navy. The Deputy Commander and U.S. Joint Task Force Commander is Lieutenant General Wallace Gregson from the U.S. Marine Corps. The Assistant Deputy Commander is Brigadier General Chin Phei Chen from the Singapore Army.

The mission begins

Flanked at the Cobra Gold 03 opening ceremony May 16 by US Ambassador Darryl Johnson and Singapore Ambassador Chan Heng Wing, Royal Thai Supreme Commander Gen. Surayud Chulanont gave direction to the troops from Thailand, Singapore and the US assembled on the U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield.

“The aim of the exercise is joint and combined special operation task force and military operations other than war,” Surayud said. “The exercise is also about helping people in the exercise area and to keep our good friendships.”

“Cobra Gold has evolved from its early years to become a confidence-building vehicle for bringing the region closer together,” Johnson said. “Today’s international military operations are multilateral endeavors. The sort of peace enforcement and peacekeeping scenarios at the heart of Cobra Gold’s command post exercise are off the front pages of today’s papers.”

At the heart of Cobra Gold is joint task force operations. A Thai and American staff structure monitored the operating picture of the combined force laydown. Those combined forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Special Operations) worked together at staff level throughout Thailand, learning each other’s tactics and methods and sharing information.

Workings with other nations in a joint and combined environment have proven effective in Afghanistan and have given nations and their service members’ confidence for a global effort to combat terror campaigns, Surayud said. Bringing resources together in scenario driven exercises creates a state of readiness and establishes a sense of camaraderie.

“The September 11 and Bali attacks, combined with



recent attacks in Saudi Arabia, Chechnya, and elsewhere, emphasize the need for the international community to come together and protect ourselves, our societies, and our citizens from the menace of terrorism,” Johnson said.

Exercises like Cobra Gold promote cooperation, and the kind of capabilities that will allow nations to live in regions where peace and economic prosperity are hallmarks, said U.S. Pacific Commander, US Navy Admiral Thomas Fargo.

“Exercises such as these are all designed to promote cooperation, and enhance capabilities that will allow us to live in a region where peace and economic prosperity are a hallmark,” he said.

The exercise itself means economic prosperity for the regions of Thailand where American troops are stationed. Supplies are purchased on the economy and hotels and restaurants are used to house and feed many of the Cobra Gold participants.



POBRA STRIKE 03

Leadership

Deputy Commander

Assistant Deputy Commander

Brig. Gen. Chin Phei Chen, Singapore Army

Commander

Rear Adm. Niwat Siripala, Royal Thai Fleet

Deputy Commander

Brig. Gen. Timothy F. Ghormley, U.S. Marine Corps

Thai: Royal Thai Fleet Marine Command Division

US: 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade,

III Marine Expeditionary Force

Commander

Maj. Gen. Pirom Tungkarat, Royal Thai Army

Deputy Commander

Maj. Gen. Eric Olson, US Army 25th Infantry

Division commander

Thai: 31st Infantry Regiment, King's Own

Bodyguards.

US: 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 2nd

Brigade, 25th Infantry Division

Commander

Rear Adm. Thagerngsak Wangkaew, Royal Thai

Fleet

Deputy Commander

Rear Adm. Frederic R. Ruehe, US Navy Region

Southwest

Thai: Royal Thai 1st Naval Area Command

US: Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 5,

Det. 9 and 51; Mobile Mine Assembly Unit 10

Commander

Vice Adm. Pitthaporn Klinfuang, Royal Thai Air

Force

Deputy Commander

Maj. Gen. John Goodman, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing

Thai: Royal Thai Air Force Wing 1

US.: 1st Marine Squadron Air Division

Commander

Royal Thai Army Maj. Gen. Bantoon Tipayanon,

1st Division Special Forces commander

Deputy Commander

US Air Force Brigadier General Gregory Trebon,

Special Operations Command Pacific

Thai: Royal Thai 5th Special Forces Division

US: Pacific Special Operations Division

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Thailand, US forces come together Combined Marine Forces

US Marines of III Marine Expeditionary Force participating in Exercise Cobra Gold 03 shared success with the Thai and Singapore armed forces, contributing and taking part in a multitude of combined training to include live-fire exercises, jungle survival and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Decontamination exercises.

The NBC training May 19 was designed to teach and learn each other's styles and techniques.

The first day's classes showed how to conduct the drills, NBC training noncommissioned officer US Marine Sgt. Clinton Schwarz said. The classes covered individual protective measures, immediate, operational and thorough decontamination and chemical detector kits.

The second day was kicked off with refresher classes in the morning and then a dry run before noon. Following the dry run was the actual training with Mission Oriented Protective Posture suits on.

The Marines conducted patrols in their chemical protection gear ensuring the area was secure and decontaminated themselves at the end of the patrol.

"Working with the Thais is very beneficial because we can both learn something from each other," Schwarz said. "Considering chemical weapons are so prevalent in the world and such focus has been directed toward them, it is important for the U.S. and its allies to prepare for any contingency our enemies may throw at us."

The Thai Marines of 4th Artillery Battalion at Ban Chan Khrem hosted a bilateral machinegun live fire with US Marines of Battery S, 5th Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division May 17.

The Thai Marines were able to use the weapons that US Marine firing batteries have, according to US Marine Capt. Jimmie Johnson, S Btry. commander.

"What we have are two groups of warriors with different things to offer each other," he said. "They both enjoy warfighting and learning."

The first three days of training involved weapons familiarization with machine guns. However, after the Thai and US Marines move out to Pong Nam Ron, they conducted their artillery training for the rest of the exercise. "These (Thai) marines are comrades in arms, and they may be fighting right next to us one day," Johnson said.

S Battery was not the only unit to have the opportunity to train with their Thai counterparts.

Staring through the night site of his M16A2 rifle, Lance Cpl. Isaac Rodriguez sprays rounds down range, quickly reloading his rifle as his Thai Marine partner provides cover fire.

The mechanic of HQ Company, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division was one of many US Marines conducting combined combat shooting drills with the Thai Marines of Reconnaissance Battalion May 15.

The instruction was meant to properly engage the enemy in a combat environment, US Marine Capt. Virgilio Arcega said.

The drills conducted throughout the day were shooting on the move, weapons handling, speed reloading while maintaining aim at the enemy, knowing when to reload and close range firing.

Thai Marine Chief Petty Officer 1st Class Sawat Jumnonchob expressed his enthusiasm working with the US Marines.

"The (US) Marines are very patient," Sawat said. "I hope to learn a lot from them, and I look forward to



the rest of the training that we will take part in during this exercise.”

With the instruction of US Marines continuing throughout the exercise, the Royal Thai Reconnaissance marines took time to ensure US Marines are training in standard operation procedures within Thailand’s jungles.

Team Leader US Marine Sgt. Robert Boyce of B Company, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, was one of many Thai and US Marines learning how to live off the land during jungle survival training May 18. The Marines learned cooking, making fire, building traps, edible plants and bugs, snake catching, and killing animals when faced with next to nothing in the jungle.

The purpose of the training was not only to teach jungle survival to the US Marines but also to “bring together the Marines of Recon,” according to US Marine Maj. Thom Atkinson, E Company commander, 4th Reconnaissance Battalion.

“We are forming a great friendship,” said Thai Marine Pvt. Supasan Sangulao. “(The US Marines) are very kind and patient.”

Atkinson said that it’s great to get training from the Thais because the US Marines aren’t trained in jungle survival like the Thais are.

“The Thai Marines are great and I think we’re going to learn a lot from each other throughout this exercise,” Boyce said. “Today alone, I’ve had a blast catching a cobra, eating bugs – everything. This is great training and we’re receiving really good knowledge that will help us survive in the future.”



Combined Army Forces

US Army airborne soldiers live to jump. So when a squad-size element got the opportunity to earn Thailand jump wings by training and jumping with a Royal Thai Army jumpmaster, the Americans from Hawaii's 25th Infantry Division couldn't get their parachutes on fast enough.

"It was an awesome experience to share with another jumpmaster the duties and responsibilities in the aircraft," said Staff Sgt. Ruben San Miguel, the 25th ID's 2nd Brigade of the May 19 "friendship jump."

At 1,500 feet, the jumpers exited the Blackhawk helicopter and within minutes were safely on the ground, repacking their chutes for another turn. The element of a new environment, combined with the rush of jumping for a Thai jumpmaster, had San Miguel using "awesome" and "amazing" to describe the event.

The most important aspect of the jump was Royal Thai Army Master Sgt. Sakchatree Sintreeraprasert, a Ranger and Airborne Infantry School instructor here, overseeing the preparation and execution. It is the only way for the 25th ID soldiers to earn Thai wings.

"I'm happy to have had the experience of working with the U.S. Army," he said, "and to be the jumpmaster today."

"There were a lot of questions as to whether or not it was going to actually happen, so I'm really glad it did," said Spc. Richard Phenix, a 87th Quartermaster rigger. "I've only been in the Army for just over a year and to have this opportunity, I'm really grateful."

After a missed turn in Iraq got a US Army convoy captured, it was never clearer that the frontline of the battlefield doesn't really exist.

As the US Army's 25th Transportation Company participated in a convoy live fire May 19, the memory of the Iraq incident reminded them how important it is for support soldiers to train with live ammunition.

The operation was one of many for the 25th Infantry Division soldiers at Cobra Gold 2003, allowing the support unit the experience two environments not available in their home station of Hawaii: wide-open training areas and a fiercer heat and humidity.

It was Spc. Travis Sheppard's first live fire training overseas and the hardest one he's ever experienced.

"It was more physically challenging and more ground tactical," he said. "It's good training. It's one of the best live fires I've done."

If the 25th Trans were to come under attack or upon an obstacle, they need to know how to react, said company 1st Sgt. Zacarias Rivera.

"From day one we preached to them about what happened to the support element from Fort Bliss, Texas that came under attack" he said. "If something like that were to happen to them, I feel confident they will be able to protect themselves."

Combined Thai-US Army operations started early in Cobra Gold 03 as the soldiers did slingload training May 13 and actual rigging of equipment for pickup by helicopter May 19.

"Today we had the opportunity to work together with the aircraft," said Thai Col. Suksan Bunchit, of the Royal Thai Army. "We know how to prepare for a sling load, we know how to use the equipment and then we had the opportunity to perform the mission with your assistance."

Thai officers participated with the 40th Quartermaster Company and will pass the training onto their soldiers.



“Everybody got hands on training,” said Sgt. Wilbin Colon, 40th Quartermaster NCO in charge of the sling load training. “It was mass participation in our company and everyone got trained to standard.”

Three US Army companies from the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment each participated in company-level combined arms live exercises the week of May 18-24.

“A live fire exercise is the closest we get to actual combat,” said 2nd Lt. Christopher York, Company A platoon leader. “We use live rounds and we try to integrate all of the combined arms.”

This particular scenario involved an assault by air with Blackhawk helicopters providing cover fire as they landed and dropped off the troops. When the entire company had arrived and set up a perimeter they moved toward the objective where they would engage the enemy and evacuate casualties.

Each infantry company is required to conduct one company-sized live fire a year and many are done in Hawaii, but York said it was good for his soldiers to participate in this training in another country.

“It gives us a different environment,” he said. “(Training in Thailand) gives you something new to work with.”

Spc. Bennie Day concurred, saying “This was the harder than the other live fires I’ve done because of the heat.”



Combined Navy Forces

Terrorists can't be counted on to use conventional weapons. Dealing with improvised explosive devices was key training for May 17 US Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit (EODMU) 5, Detachments 9 and 51, and Royal Thai Navy EOD Team 2.

According to Chief Gunner's Mate Dave Mummert of EODMU 5 all involved got smarter.

"These are really good guys," he said of the Thais. "Everybody's really easy to work with. They are picking up different procedures from us and we're learning from them, so I'd say we've had very smooth training so far."

"I enjoy working with the US Navy," said RTN EOD member Ai Sanl said. "It boosts our spirits and knowledge. I have participated in this exercise for the past two years, and the Americans give us more experience and show us new technology which helps us do our job."

The two units completed land and sea jumps from US Marine aircraft May 20-21.

US Navy Cmdr. Jay Lewis, EODMU 5 commander, believes all the training puts the teams on the same page and smoothes potential real-world operations in the future.

"The whole idea behind Cobra Gold is that we're working with our Thai counterparts across the entire spectrum," he said. "If we have to go somewhere in country, they can be our guides and interpreters and we'll be at the same level of training."

Thai and US sailors boarded the USMC KC-130 airplane on the early morning May 20-21, preparing for any contingency they might be called to act on in a joint environment.

"This has been the best training across the

board," Lewis said. "All together we're doing diving, demolition, shooting and jumping together. It's great, we're making life-long friends."

During the first series of jumps over land, the jumpers focused their training on different aspects of airborne insertions including jumping from different altitudes and practicing different types of jumps such as free fall.

The second series of jumps involved the team members dropping a rubber boat into an aquatic drop zone, then parachuting out of the aircraft, swimming to the boat, boarding it and driving it to shore.

Following the jumps, Chief Air Ordnanceman Andrew Levy said the operation went well and that teamwork was a vital ingredient for their success.

"It was a good operation, everybody pulled together," Levy said. "Thailand is a great place to operate."

Sailors from the Royal Thai Navy Mine Prep Shop and the US Navy Mobile Mine Assembly Unit 10 spent May 19 loading MK-62 mines onto an American P3 Orion plane. The two units build mines for all branches of service and load them on planes or ships to be deployed in the water.

"We're protecting our interests," by sharing operations with each other, US Navy Lt. Cmdr. John Cross, MOMAU 10 commander said. "Through our sharing of procedures and training, we learn each others operations and determine how we can improve upon them. This helps to strengthen our interoperability."

Many ships use mines, so the units are important to Thailand and the US, said Thai Master Chief Petty Officer Chalon Dittaluk, Mine Prep Shop chief. Ships can use the mines to protect their shores or to combat threats.

"U.S.-Thai training helps provide the Royal Thai Navy with additional operational capabilities," he said. "It gives us a chance to work with the newest weapons





Combined Training



Combined Special Operations

Risking their lives to save lives, Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) could mean the difference between life and death to service members who find themselves lost in hostile territory.

It is a highly-specialized business of personnel recovery and few do it better than the US Air Force 353rd Special Operations Group assigned to the Combined Special Operations Task



Force at Cobra Gold 03.

US Air Force Capt. Leo Chong, assigned to the 17th Special Operations Squadron at Japan's Kadena Air Base, is serving in the Asia-Pacific region's premiere combined military exercise for the first time. As navigator aboard the MC-130P Combat Shadow, he and the rest of the 353rd are here to share operational knowledge with the Thai military.

"Whenever there is a combat search and rescue mission, it is often a joint effort," Chong said.

Although no actual CSAR missions were conducted this year at Cobra Gold, there were several scenarios planned and executed. Working with their Thai counterparts, they practiced command and control, personnel extraction, and exchanged ideas on how to carry out future missions.

The challenges of working with a military ally on potentially sensitive, dangerous missions like CSAR are made easier, Chong feels, with the type of training done at Cobra Gold.

"Communication sometimes can be a challenge but being here at Cobra Gold this year has given us the unique opportunity to interact with Thai people and culture," he said. "The Thai's are

very friendly."

More than 200 Batcats, the 353rd Special Operations Group from Kadena Air Base, Japan, were scattered throughout Thailand for Cobra Gold 2003, facing the combined challenges of the high-level communications that are key to special operations and forging alliances with the Royal Thai Armed Forces.

Crews from the 17th Special Operations Squadron flying MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft were busy in the early stages of the exercise conducting personnel and resupply airdrops, and aerial refueling helicopters from E, Company of the U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, Taegu Air Base, Korea. For the exercise E, Company conducted airdrops and infiltration operations for Thai and U.S. special operations forces.

Later, the 17th SOS was joined by its sister squadron, the 1st SOS flying MC-130H Combat Talons. During the exercise, the units practiced infiltration, exfiltration and high-speed resupply operations.

"The two biggest pieces of the Special Operations air picture are the MC-130s here and the Army MH-47E Chinook helicopters in U-Tapao Thai Naval Air Station, 250 miles south," said Lt. Col. Richard Samuels, 353rd commander.

Various tests throughout the Cobra Gold schedule are called full mission profiles — where several components pull together to exercise specific tasks.

"The lesson learned here is to get communications established early," Samuels said.

Combat Shadow pilot Lt. Col. Walt Schenberger echoes Samuels' sentiments.

"The communications connectivity is crucial during pre-mission planning and mission execution," he said. "The ability to talk with the helicopter crews as we plan and fly Cobra Gold missions is crucial."





Combined Training



“We have got to get these people out of here.”

The last US helicopter out of Saigon in 1975 was part of a non-combatant evacuation operation. In 1997, a NEO from Sierra Leone saved thousands.

As non-traditional warfare becomes more of a threat, NEOs may become more of a reality. Terror tactics make everyone anywhere a target. Protecting and evacuating citizens in any dozens of scenarios have become the responsibility of every country's military.

May 24 in Bangkok two large buses slowly creep to the front gates of a compound as a mob of vicious rioters violently attack the Thai and U.S. Marines protecting the vehicles.

“One, two, three, four, five, get back!” American Marines yell, advancing forward to keep the rioters away. These zealots punch, kick, toss and throw anything within reach to assault the combined force. But the Thai and American Marines hold their ground, safely escorting the citizens into the compound.

Even though it looked real, it was a mock Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) training exercise conducted by the Thai and U.S. Marines during Cobra Gold 2003. The NEO is one of the most significant events showcasing the interoperability between the Thailand and American militaries in response to force protection responsibilities for Embassy personnel and the combined military training skills acquired during Cobra Gold.

It was staged to prepare both nations' forces for when situations that can go real bad, according to George Kent, Cobra Gold's lead NEO civilian official.

“When it all goes bad and there's no other alternative, a NEO is necessary in order to assure the safe removal of citizens in a dangerous situation,” he said.

Volunteers were gathered into two charter buses waiting to be safely removed and processed through the NEO site. Once the citizens were processed and ready to go, two U.S. Marine CH-53E helicopters flew in to pick them up.

“The processing went very smoothly,” said Chuck Audet, a volunteer American citizen for the exercise. “The Marines were very accommodating and attentive to our needs.”

Throughout the exercise, the rioters attacked as the

citizens entered the base and when they departed to the helicopters.

“The rioters made the entire exercise seem extremely real-life,” Audet said. “They gave a great portrayal of what might actually happen in a situation like this.”

The US Army picked up tracking duties at the intermediate staging base, utilizing three Noncombatant Tracking System 2000s. The system speeds up the evacuation process, said 1st Lt. Christina Gutierrez, NTS 2000 system OIC, 524th Corps Support Battalion.

“This system is to reassure they will get back to the states safely and quickly,” she said. “Traditionally, it would take seven minutes per person to process them through the evacuation process. Now, with this system, we can process a family of four through in about two minutes.”

Evacuees show identification after arriving to an evacuation control center. From there, their personal information is placed into the NTS 2000 from the first site. Information such as special needs, medical and financial information is loaded in the system and a bracelet is assigned to that individual.

“It's just like a FedEx package,” said Capt Angelina Moreno, 524th CSB. “Once they're in the system all their information is transmitted via satellite to their final destination.”



Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation



Noncombatant Evacuation Operation Exercise (NEO)

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Gentlemen with care in their hearts

Uniformed Thai children run barefoot across a soccer field chasing a US Air Force special operations airman. Nearby a group of girls tried out a badminton set. The air was full of Frisbees, shuttlecocks, soccer balls and screaming voices and sweaty faces — it looked like a battle zone. Everyone was winning.

Two dozen airmen from the US Air Force 353rd Special Operations Group spent May 26 deep in this jungle village playing patty-cake, singing songs, and sharing smiles after their “Operation Toy Drop” brought six tons of clothes, toys, books, school supplies and furniture to two remote elementary schools in rural northeastern Thailand.

Many of the clothes were donated from the unit’s home, Kadena Air Base, Japan, and the deployed airmen raised more than \$2,200 to buy desks and chairs for the earthen-floored schools.

Senior Master Sgt. Vic Ambegia, 353rd Maintenance Squadron, spearheaded the donation efforts.

“The Kadena community is fantastic about offering up second-hand items that still have usefulness. We gather the clothes and toys, pack them according to age and gender of recipients, and then box them up for transportation,” he said. “We try to focus on what the children need. We try to keep their health, welfare and education in mind when soliciting donations.”

Payak Ratanapakorn, principal of Barntard Elementary School, was pleased at the huge donation filling the stage of his modest auditorium.

“You have given so generously of yourselves,” he said to the unit’s members. “We are thankful for your kindness. These children will benefit greatly from this donation.”

Six-year-old Lud Dawan hugged her Teddy Bear tightly and smiled a broad, but toothless, grin when asked if she liked her new toy.

“*Chawp mak*,” she said. (I like it a lot.)

The obvious activities in Cobra Gold 03 involved hundreds of Thai and US military forces conducting combined operations all over the nation.

The seldom-seen goings-on like above were kinder and gentler: US Marines visiting an orphanage with school supplies and toys for the children. A group of medical professionals coming into a rural village, not departing until every Thai man, woman, child was seen, evaluated and treated. US Army engineers working with Thais renovating or building schools and other community facilities.



The resources the American military brings to Cobra Gold are not exclusively warfighting. Humanitarian assistance, official and voluntary, spreads throughout the Thai regions where US forces train.

Four sailors from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 3 and 14 Royal Thai Navy Sailors concluded nearly a month’s work revitalizing the facilities at two Thai elementary schools, Ban Khao Huay Mahad and Ban Chang, May 19.

Teachers and students smiled ear to ear and thanked the US and Thai workers of both navies.

“The project is very helpful for us,” said Wanpin Kittiyayan, a teacher at the Ban Khao Huay Mahad School. “The teachers and the students are very happy and we hope that next year the Navy comes here again.”

Electrician 3rd Class Carlos Perez of NMCB 3 said his experience has been fun, but definitely different.

“Everything we did, we did it with the Thai’s, and they’re great,” Perez said. “I would do this again, it’s been fun.”

US Marine Corps Company C, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, visited Ban Kouw Laem Elementary School and Kindergarten May 21 to donate more than \$400 worth of school supplies and sports equipment to the children, according to U.S. Navy Chaplain Lt. Kenny Lee.

“When we came out here, we contacted the local community through our translator and tried to find the neediest schools,” he said. “We were pointed in the direction of these two schools and I think both the schools and the Marines were excited to meet each other.”

This was the first time U.S. Marines have visited these schools. Lee will do what he can to see that the US military returns in the future “through the chaplain network.”

“The teachers were very excited and curious when we asked to come volunteer,” he said. “So, I think they will definitely want to have us over again next year.”

The donations came out of Co. C Marines’ pockets.



Driver Assistance



Making friends through the air, on the pitch

No matter the language or cultural barriers, when service members get together, there is a bond. Defenders of a nation's borders instinctively realize the special relationship they share. Cobra Gold 03 contributed to this camaraderie with many events.

Most all of the combined forces participated in "friendship jumps," strapping on parachutes and exiting aircraft. The biggest one of all however took place May 17 at the Royal Thai Marine Corps base at Toei Ngarm Gulf.

Royal Thai Supreme Commander Gen. Surayud Chulanont and five of his staff officers, all generals, joined six Americans, including US Air Force Brig. Gen. Gregory Trebon, Special Operations Command Pacific commander, and US Navy Rear Adm. Frederic Ruehe, US Navy Region Southwest commander, and 31 Thai soldiers on the US Marine Corps C-130 airplane departing from U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield.

Surayud's distinctive parachute was the same color as the Thai national flag, sporting four white stars. Strong winds affected all the jumpers and afterwards Surayud announced it would be his last jump as he retires this year.

U-Tapao Air Base hosted another friendly combined event the same day, a soccer game



between US Marines and a Thai military team. The Marines weren't so successful at holding their ground this day, losing 3-2.

Spectators from both countries filled the sidelines, watching Thailand's Watcharane Roddee tally early in the match, staking the home team to a 1-0 lead.

"The U.S. team was very good," explained Roddee, who's been playing soccer for five years. "It was a good competition; our team's skill levels were very equal."

Halfway through the opening period, he struck again, giving the Thais a 2-0 lead and putting a lot of pressure on the Marine defense.

Marines Derek Armstrong and Jeremy Lima scored in the first and second halves, respectively, getting the Americans a tie 2-2 midway through the second half.

"I thought I saw it (go in), but I wasn't sure," said Lima. "I put the ball right where I wanted to, but I expected a teammate to get a touch before it went in."

The tie did not last long as one-man gang Roddee found a hole in the Marine defense for a third time, striking the decisive goal of the match.

As the whistle blew, the Thai team came away with a 3-2 victory, but everyone walked off the pitch with a smile.



Friendship



